

Julian's youth group was camping in a national forest in Tennessee. The youth leaders wanted to be sure that everyone could identify the poisonous snakes in the area and learn how to avoid being bitten by them. They invited a park ranger to the evening campfire to discuss snakes and prevention safety.

"The most common poisonous snakes in this area include the copperhead, rattlesnake, and water moccasin, otherwise know as the cottonmouth," he said. He then showed the group pictures of each kind of snake and told them how to recognize them.

"Snakes do not want to bite you because they cannot eat you. They would rather save their venom to catch prey," he continued. "Snakes will usually attempt to get away or to scare you away before biting."

One of the leaders asked, "What precautions should we take?" "First of all, wear high-top leather boots and loose pants. Let the cuff hang on the outside of your boot," the ranger instructed. "Second, do not sleep on the ground unless you want a snake to snuggle in beside you to keep warm!" The group laughed, but some people shrieked with horror.

The ranger continued, "Keep an eye out at all times so that you don't surprise a snake. Many bites occur when the snake is surprised. Check the other side of logs before you step over them. If you are climbing, never reach with your hand into an area you cannot see."

"What should you do if you are bitten?" asked one of the campers.

"The first thing you should do is make sure you were actually bitten. Often the snake either does not penetrate the skin with his fangs

or does not inject poison," he explained. "Try to get a good look at the snake, but do not try to catch it. The frightened snake may bite you again!"

"Is it true that you should not run after you have been bitten?" Julian asked.

"Yes," the ranger replied. "You should get to the doctor as quickly as possible, but try to remain calm. Do not exert yourself. The faster your heart beats the more quickly your blood pumps. This will make the poison spread more quickly."

"Should you cut the bite open with a pocket knife and suck the poison out like they do in the Western movies?" another member of the group asked, jokingly.

"Usually that makes a more serious injury than the snakebite itself!" was the answer.

When the meeting was over, the campers returned to their tents to go to sleep. All over the campsite, Julian could hear the sound of sleeping bags being zipped wide open. Everyone was checking for unwelcome guests!

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